



Ashby Village volunteers at work. Photo by Pat Carvalho.

Spotlight on Ashby Village A World of Seniors Engaged in Their Community

BY LISA CARLSON

Aging well and with grace doesn't require a gym membership or expensive beauty products.

Rather, a sense of purpose is the key to getting the most out of your life.

Brooke Nelson, Readers' Digest

Ashby Village is a “virtual” senior community, one without walls. Members, aged fifty and above, support one another in remaining active and independent while living at home. More importantly, Ashby Village helps harness the power of aging in the community through continuous learning, social connection, and maintaining a sense of purpose. With one in five residents of Berkeley expected to be over the age of sixty-five by 2020, those who are healthy often hope to age in place. Those who need medical support express the desire to continue to live at home, too.

Ashby Village, a nonprofit, was founded in 2010 as part of the national village movement to help people age in place. The organization connects members with resources and one another. There are 400 current members and about 275 volunteers residing in Albany, Berkeley, El Cerrito, Emeryville, Kensington and parts of Oakland. About 120 members are Berkeley Hills residents, and they are part of one of the seven Ashby Village Neighborhood groups – a very popular source of social activities for members where they can get together close to home.

The first village, Beacon Hill, in Boston, launched in 1993. The initial concept was of a community of people who pool resources by paying membership dues and volunteering their skills and time to help one another. There are currently 200 villages in the U.S., and 150 are being organized across the country; most of them are in California.

Berkeley's Ashby Village maintains offices and conference rooms in rented space at the beautiful, historic Thousand Oaks Baptist Church off Solano Avenue. Entertainment and exercise classes take place in the Julia Morgan Hall in that building.

“We greatly contribute to social well-being in older age, reduce isolation, decrease health risks and therefore prevent or postpone the need for expensive institutional care. We support the psychological, functional, and emotional well-being of our members through social, educational and cultural events,” said Executive Director Andy Gaines.

“Volunteerism is a cornerstone of the Village model, drawing upon the untapped capacity of people in our communities to support each other.

Our Village has a ‘volunteer-first’ policy, finding a qualified volunteer to fulfill a request before referring members to a commercial vendor. Ashby Village volunteers include members, their children, college students, empty nesters, retirees, and many others from the community,” according to the organization’s website.

Volunteer training is taken seriously and takes place on a Saturday every three to four months. Volunteers are carefully screened prior to engaging with seniors.

“We have a good retention rate. We have appreciation events, send birthday and holiday cards...we’re like a big family,” said Community Engagement Manager Manuela Pegoraro.

Offering Practical Services

Ashby Village’s three pillars are: services, programs and community. It offers a wide variety of services while connecting members with each other and with younger volunteers. Services include:

- Transportation to grocery shopping and medical appointments
- Assistance with medical appointments by MedPals
- Computer and electronic help
- Light gardening
- Small repairs
- Companionship, including reading aloud
- Home organizing
- Food preparation
- Pet care

It’s a fact of life that as we age we navigate changes, challenges and transformations, and individuals will experience these at their own biological and emotional pace. Ashby Village offers support services to help with emotional processing of loss, illness and isolation, as well as with practical matters like decluttering. Volunteers work in teams, including the Social

Care, Caring, and Connection teams, and they reach out to members by phone and with visits. They also provide referrals to home-care providers, clinical and other therapeutic resources.

Strengthening the Mind and Body

Mind and body are intimately connected, and Ashby Village has an array of healthy offerings to address both, including meditation, nature walks, strength training, tai-chi and yoga.

The organization publishes a monthly newsletter, *Village Voices*, featuring a column with tips and resources and a calendar of events listing myriad activities. There are wide-ranging discussions about local and global issues, games (including bridge and mah jongg), knitting, puzzle making, music, play reading and poetry – something for everyone.

Be Social, Stay Connected

Monthly happy hours, neighborhood potlucks and a variety of interest groups engage participants and help keep them socially connected. Individual tastes and interests drive the offerings; if a member yearns for, say, a non-fiction book club, Ashby Village is there to help. Says Bill F., a village member, “I am a ‘dreamer.’ The details of the dream have changed over the years as my life situation has changed. Ashby Village is a community where a big part of this dream is embodied.”

How to Join

Memberships are annual and start on the first of the month a person joins. At the high end, a Sustaining Membership supports both the individual and Ashby Village simultaneously. Regular memberships are reasonably priced and can be paid monthly. The organization also offers subsidized “It Takes A Village” plans. Ashby Village commits to building a community that reflects the Bay Area’s diverse population, including low-income citizens – those with incomes below the Elder Economic Security Standard Index.

Introductions to Ashby Village (“Living Room Chats”) are held monthly in members’ homes. One will be held in Park Hills Sunday, July 15, from 2-4pm. For details, please contact the office or check the Ashby Village website.

Contact Ashby Village

1821 Catalina Ave
Berkeley, CA 94707
(510) 204-9200
www.ashbyvillage.org

Ashby Village welcomes donations of cash, stock, mutual funds, furniture, supplies and equipment. It's a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt nonprofit organization (EIN: 27-2174330).



Potluck at Ashby Village North Berkeley Neighborhood Group.
Photo by Robert Bermack.

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